



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Online Mental Health for Youth

Youth struggling with post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and other challenging issues can now get the mental health treatment they need without leaving home.

The Board of Supervisors authorized a contract with the University of Southern California to provide online mental health – also called tele-mental health – servicing youth and adults ages 12-to-21, who manifest mild-to-moderate psychiatric symptoms.

Under the program, County Department of Mental Health social workers at the Martin Luther King, Jr. medical hub and similar facilities would refer youth to a completely virtual behavioral health clinic operated by USC Telehealth and USC's School of Social Work. The youth would then consult with licensed clinical social workers or Masters of Social Work interns via a secure HIPAA-compliant Internet platform – all they have to do is turn on their home computer, laptop or tablet, or a loaner iPad provided by the program.

"This is a novel way to help at-risk youth," said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. "The program makes critically needed early intervention easily accessible and convenient to youth, by using technology familiar to them."

"With this innovative project, we will finally be able to stay in easy and immediate touch with those youth who so much need to hear from us as they struggle with trauma and troubled family life," USC School of Social Work Dean Marilyn Flynn said. "This advance will allow us to reach out to every neighborhood in Los Angeles, at any time of day, to offer support, expert guidance and referral. The county has truly made possible a new form of care that should help these youth meet challenges in a more resilient way."

The program would serve youth who have come to the attention of the child welfare system, but still remain at home, and young adults up to age 21, including those who are transitioning out of foster care. These individuals may have suffered or witnessed trauma, such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, neglect or traumatic loss, and are experiencing emotional or behavioral challenges.

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